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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: SADR CITY DISPLACEMENT

1.(SBU) SUMMARY: The conflict between the GOI and Sadrists militants that ignited in late March led to fears of a large-scale humanitarian crisis given the heavy density of the civilian population in the area and the potential for wide-spread and destructive engagements. Considering a worse-case scenario, the GOI developed plans to provide shelter and assistance for up to 100,000 Sadr City residents that might be forced from their homes by the fighting. The Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM) took the lead for the GOI, and backed by a USAID-supported NGO, established a camp at the Shaab soccer stadium in Rusafa that could accommodate 5,000 displaced persons.
END SUMMARY.

¶2. Estimates of the total families displaced during the fighting ran to 4,700; however, only 39 families required shelter and aid at the Shaab stadium. As anticipated by USAID and other aid agencies, virtually all of those Sadr City residents displaced by the conflict stayed with family, friends and neighbors. In the week since the cease-fire went into effect on 18 May, all families left the Shaab camp and returned home and it is believed that the majority of others displaced returned to their residences as well. The cease-fire and its successful implementation averted a humanitarian emergency.

Background to Anticipated Displacement Crisis

¶3. (SBU) The GOI anticipated significant displacement from Sadr City as U.S. and Iraqi forces entered the area in early April to target militants firing rockets and mortars at the International Zone (IZ) and attempting to force Sadr City residents to observe a general strike. U.S. forces started building a concrete wall separating the southernmost part of Sadr City (sectors 1-9 and the Jamila market area) from the northern 75 percent because militants were launching daily rocket and mortar volleys at the International Zone from those areas. Militia elements shot at civilians not observing the strike and launched attacks from densely populated civilian areas against U.S. forces building the wall. Civilians caught in the crossfire began fleeing their homes, mostly to stay with friends and relatives elsewhere in Sadr City or in other neighborhoods in Baghdad. In anticipation of a push by U.S. or Iraqi forces into areas north of the walled area, MoDM started planning for the potential displacement of thousands of civilians from Sadr City in early May.

4.(SBU) MoDM identified three sites to set up tent camps to accommodate civilians fleeing Sadr City; Shaab Stadium in Rusafa, Sinaa Stadium in Nine Nissan, and the Rashid Airbase in Karada. MoDM determined that

Shaab and Sinaa Stadiums could accommodate several hundred families each, while the Rashid Airbase could hold thousands of families if necessary. MoDM said it had 1,000 tents on hand and that the Iraqi Red Crescent Organization, a MoDM implementing partner, had about 15,000 tents on hand and another 15,000 tents inbound. Minister of MoDM, Abdel Samd Rahman Sultan, told USAID and Baghdad PRT representatives that he expected most displaced families would stay with friends or relatives rather than going to camps, but that the ministry would plan for camps anyway.

¶ 5. In an effort to provide an alternative to families being displaced in Sadr City, the UNHCR initiated a housing rehabilitation project and a Non Food Items (NFIs) distribution project through their implementing partner Mercy Hands. To date, approximately 35 houses have been returned to a livable state and the families are living in the houses; by 31 May, 100 houses will have been returned to a livable state so that the families can avoid being displaced. In addition, Mercy Hands has distributed 795 NFI packets to families in need throughout Sadr City over the last month in a further effort to prevent displacement.

¶ 6. (SBU) Iraqi Army elements reportedly notified residents by loudspeaker and through community leaders that people wishing to flee the area could gather at identified collection points for transport to the camps. Since there was little demand, MoDM only opened the Shaab Stadium Camp on 10 May. Note: Iraqis traditionally eschew camps and see them as only

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a last resort when facing displacement. Preferred coping strategies include sheltering with family, friends and neighbors or staying in public buildings (mosques, schools, etc). In theory, the MoDM planned the camp sites and set them up. However, a USAID Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) implementing partner, International Medical Corps (IMC), provided significant technical assistance, water, food, and supplies for the camp.

7.(SBU) The Shaab Stadium Camp was equipped with three toilet compounds, each of which had 75 toilets, along with large water storage tanks and ten 5,500 liter portable tanks that IMC arranged for Amanat Baghdad (Baghdad Municipality) to fill. According IMC, the Amanat also agreed to remove trash from the camp. The camp was equipped with a clinic, but when the Directorate of Health for Rusafa refused to staff it with doctors, IMC paid doctors to work at the camp for two hours per day. The Ministry of Health provided two ambulances to provide transport for serious injuries or illnesses.

8.(SBU) Families were required to provide documentation from either Mudhafar Square or Jazeera Iraqi Police Stations to prove that they were from Sadr City and that they were not wanted by either Iraqi or U.S. security forces before camp personnel would let them enter and register. The Iraqi Army provided security for the camp.

9.(SBU) At the height of occupancy, there were 38 families residing in the camp. As of 26 May, all families had departed Al Shaab and returned to Sadr City. MoDM staff said most of the families had returned because of improved security conditions in Sadr City. MoDM staff noted that of 5,000 families that were temporarily displaced from or within Sadr City in recent weeks, about 4,500 families have returned and about 300 remain displaced outside of Sadr City. These figures represent rough estimates, but it is probable that most families have returned to

Sadr City since the cease-fire except for those whose dwellings were destroyed or badly damaged by the recent fighting.

¶10. (SBU) MoDM formed an emergency cell with representatives from the humanitarian, planning, administration and information departments to oversee developments at the camp and monitor the humanitarian situation inside of Sadr City. The cell continues to meet daily and has re-focused its works to assess damage to homes and businesses in Sadr City.

Comment

¶11. (SBU) The ministry took a clear leadership role in planning for large scale displacement. However, MoDM's heavy reliance on IMC in establishing and maintaining the Shaab Stadium Camp illustrates that while MoDM is performing at a much higher level than it was a year ago, it still has limited capacity to address displacement crises.

¶12. (SBU) Several international NGOs provided food to the camp even when it only accommodated a few families, prompting MoDM staff to tell USAID and Baghdad PRT representatives during a May 17 visit that they had "an arsenal" of food. The duplicate effort on such a small operation illustrates the need for better interagency coordination on humanitarian activities.

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